



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
CITY OF CHICAGO

**Testimony to the
City Council Committee on Health and Environmental Protection**

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**Provided by
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Good morning. I am Dr. Bechara Choucair, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health.

It's unfortunate that we are here today to discuss a proposed ordinance to allow smoking rooms in nursing home facilities in our city.

Chicago's Clean Indoor Air ordinance is one of the most important pieces of health legislation this city has ever passed. Weakening this ordinance is a major leap in the wrong direction.

Let me be very clear from the start: Make no mistake about it, this proposed ordinance will have a negative impact on the health of Chicagoans.

Your Chicago Department of Public Health is opposed to this ordinance for 3 main reasons:

- First, Residents, employees and visitors will suffer negative health impacts related to expanding common smoking rooms in these facilities. Whether you reside, you work or you visit these facilities, your risk of dying from a tobacco related illness will increase because of this ordinance.
- Second, it will be difficult for nursing home facilities to ensure that smoke does not infiltrate into other areas of these facilities
- Lastly, there are several mitigating safety issues and costs that will inhibit the implementation and enforcement of this proposed ordinance.

Let me start by sharing with you the health impacts of this ordinance you are considering today.

As the Health Commissioner for the third largest City in our nation, I am strongly opposed to any piece of legislation that promotes smoking. We all know that this is **a deadly habit that is the number one cause of death in our city and in our nation.** I know that I am not alone.

Amending Chicago's Clean Indoor Air ordinance as is proposed in this ordinance today will have definite negative impact to the health of Chicagoans especially the vulnerable populations served in the facilities targeted for change: Seniors and residents with mental illness.

Smoking and second-hand smoke are associated with all major causes of death among the elderly such as cancer, heart disease and stroke. Of the 443,000 smoking related deaths annually in the US, over 94% are to persons aged 50 and over, while over 70% are to persons aged 65 and over.

Many nursing homes in Chicago not only include older adults, but also residents with mental illness. Persons with mental illness are dying 25 years earlier than the general population. Did you know that tobacco is linked to most of the major causes of death in this population?

So let me say this again: for our senior residents living in nursing homes and for residents with mental illness, this proposed ordinance has clear negative health impacts.

Let me also say that the health effects of this proposed ordinance will be deadly not only to the patients targeted by this change but also to the employees working within these facilities and to visitors.

I would like to mention that this isn't just my professional opinion but it is the opinion shared by the U.S. Surgeon General who has emphatically stated:

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.

Coupled with that - The U.S. Surgeon General, the National Research Council, the National Academy of Sciences, as well as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), have found that separating smokers and nonsmokers within the same airspace may reduce, **but does not eliminate**, a non-smokers exposure to environmental tobacco smoke.

So in addition to the negative health impacts on seniors and on residents with mental illness, this proposed ordinance will clearly expose workers in these facilities to second hand smoke and hence increase their risk of dying of a tobacco related illness.

Also, according to the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers, ventilation technology is insufficient to protect building occupants from secondhand smoke. This is the body that sets the standard for indoor air quality.

In addition to the health effects of secondhand smoke, creating an exemption for smoking rooms in nursing facilities also raises fire and safety concerns. The United States Fire Administration has determined that Smoking is the leading cause of residential fires that result in fatalities in older adults. Persons 75 and over are three times as likely to die in a fire as are younger adults, and persons 85 and over are four times as likely to die as younger adults.

Finally, the Department will also bear unforeseen and unknown cost burdens through the monitoring and the enforcement of this proposed ordinance. These costs will be an additional burden to Chicago's taxpayers for an ordinance that will worsen the health status of those same taxpayers.

In closing I'd like to remind our Committee on Health & Environmental Protection of the city-wide public health agenda Mayor Emanuel and I recently announced, *Healthy Chicago*, our plan to make Chicago the healthiest city in the nation. This is an ambitious goal and one that we can reach if we are all willing to stand together for the health of our city.

I'm well aware that the state of Illinois passed a law in 2009 to allow common smoking rooms in many of the facilities we are discussing today.

I would like you to take a moment to remember 2005. In 2005, The Committee on Health of the Chicago City Council led the State by advancing the Clean Indoor Air Ordinance. Shortly after, the State followed Chicago by taking a step forward. If the Chicago City Council Committee on Health and Environmental Protection advances this ordinance today, Chicago will be following the State at a time when our State unfortunately took a step backward.

Tobacco kills more Americans than AIDS, cocaine, heroin, alcohol, car accidents, homicide and suicide combined. This is why Tobacco Prevention is a top priority in Healthy Chicago and a priority of every major health department in the nation.

As national leaders in public health, the decisions we make here in Chicago will impact decisions made across the country.

The eyes of the nation are upon us today and I'm asking our Committee on Health and Environmental Protection and all our city council members to stand with me for the health of our city.

As the health commissioner of this great city, I can't support a policy that will take us backward. I trust that the Committee on Health and Environmental Protection won't do that either.

Let's keep our city moving forward.

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